

SUGGESTED PROCEDURES FOR CONTROL OF HEAD LICE IN SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTION

Pediculosis (head lice) outbreaks are not new in most Michigan schools. However, the number of head lice cases reported in Michigan increased last year, and with this increase, there was more concern about prevention and control of this nuisance disease from both school personnel and parents. Pediculosis outbreaks have always been more common in the school age population, particularly in elementary schools. The information and suggested procedures in this document were taken from the Oakland County Health Division's Pediculosis Control Guidelines.

Lice are transmitted from person to person by direct contact or by sharing clothing (hats, scarves, etc.) and personal items (combs, brushes, etc.). Head lice control is directed at disrupting this cycle of transmission. This is accomplished by the prompt identification and treatment of cases and by the institution of environmental control measures. A thorough understanding of the timing of the life cycle and biology of the louse is essential before successful control measures can be implemented.

Head lice are insects. They are slightly less than 1/8 inch long and light to dark tan in color. Eggs (nits) are laid by the adult female louse and are usually attached to the hair shaft within 1/4 inch of the scalp. The smooth, plump, grayish white nits are barely visible to the naked eye. After an egg is laid it incubates on the hair shaft for approximately one week, at which time it hatches. The newly emerged immature louse must obtain a blood meal within 24 hours or it will die. Providing that conditions are suitable for development, the immature louse will reach maturity in 8-9 days. Once maturity is reached, the female louse mates and begins depositing 3-4 eggs per day. During the adult female's 30-day life span, she lays approximately 90 nits. The complete life span from egg to death is approximately 48 days or 7 weeks.

In response to the recent increase in head lice cases in schools, the following suggestions for control procedures are offered. It is hoped that these suggestions for control procedures are offered. It is hoped that these suggestions, if followed, will:

- Disrupt the transmission cycle in the school setting through early identification of cases; and verification that treatment has been completed.
- Encourage early casefinding in both the school and community.
- Provide practical environmental measures to be used in the school setting.

There is, presently, no foolproof method to completely eliminate a head lice problem in a school. The suggested control measures listed in this document are those, which have been found to be the most effective in reducing the problem in a relatively short period of time.

Both the school and the family need to recognize a joint responsibility in controlling and preventing head lice. The school personnel need to make families aware of:

- Presence of cases of head lice in a school building.
- Actions they will be taking to control and prevent spread in the school.
- Actions parents need to take in terms of treatment and home environmental control measures when their child is identified as having head lice.

The family needs to cooperate with the school by:

- Notifying the school if their child has head lice.
- Following recommended treatment procedures and environmental control measures in the home.

SUGGESTED PROCEDURES

Reporting of Cases

1. Families should be encouraged to report all cases of head lice to the building principal.
2. The building principal should notify classroom parents where cases of head lice have been found in that classroom, and should notify all parents of the school when multiple classrooms are involved. It is most helpful when notifying parents to provide them with enough information so that they can check their own children and can know what the expected treatment procedures are for them to follow if their child is found to have head lice.

Indications for Conducting Head Checks

1. When a case of head lice is identified in a classroom, a head check of all classroom members should be conducted, as well as a check of all siblings and close friends.
2. If any of the siblings or friends of the infested student are also infested, their classrooms should also be checked.
3. Periodically the question arises when to do a total school head check. The identification of a number of head lice cases is not necessarily indicative

of a school-wide problem. A number of factors must be considered to determine the extent of the outbreak. Unnecessary screening is time consuming and disruptive to the education process. For these reasons mass screening should be considered only after evaluating each outbreak on an individual basis. If a building or district policy requires periodic total school head checks, parents/guardians should be notified at the beginning of the school year that this procedure would take place.

Conducting and Verifying Head Checks

1. Head checks can be conducted in a classroom or other designated area that has adapted light to facilitate examination.
2. When cases are discovered, a second person in the school, preferably the principal or his/her designee, should verify the presence of head lice.
3. The principal or his/her designee should contact the parents and explain the need to remove the student from school until after treatment recommended by a private physician or the local health department has been instituted. At this time instructions on home environmental controls and the district's policy on nit removal should be given to the parent/guardian who comes to pick up the child.
4. A list is kept by the principal, or his/her designee, of those students who are excluded from school so that verification will exist of the treatment dates and the condition of the hair at reentry.

Verification of Treatment

Treatment for head lice includes the application of an insecticide shampoo per instructions on the product label or instructions from a private physician or local health department. No product claims 100% effectiveness in killing all nits. For this reason, some products require a second shampoo 7 to 10 days after the initial treatment. Since only an examination of a nit under a microscope can determine its viability after treatment, it is recommended that all nits be removed from the hair. Schools need to determine if their policy on this matter will be the removal of all nits before the student is able to return to school, or whether all nits must be removed from the hair within one week. **REPEATED TREATMENTS ARE NOT RECOMMENDED AND SHOULD NOT BE CARRIED OUT UNLESS PRESCRIBED BY A PHYSICIAN.**

1. A student should not be readmitted to school until treatment is verified. Verification of treatment by a parent/guardian should be in writing and include the identification of treatment shampoo used and the date of the treatment.

2. The principal, or his/her designee, should check the reentering student's hair. If a "no nit" school district policy is in place, a student should be re-excluded from school if nits are found. If a policy exists for complete nit removal in one week, the student can be readmitted to school, but a reminder of the need to remove all nits should be sent home with the student.
3. A repeat head check by the principal or his/her designee should be done within 7 to 10 days on any student who has been treated to be certain that re-infestation has not occurred.

Environmental Control Measures

1. Whenever an outbreak of head lice occurs in a school building, it should be used as a "teachable moment" and students should be reminded about personal control procedures (not sharing hats, combs, etc.) that are their responsibility. Students and staff should also be reminded that head lice is a communicable condition, is a nuisance rather than a serious medical condition, and it not a result of a lack of cleanliness.
2. Coats can be hung on back of chairs or on wall hooks 12 inches or more apart or stored in individual plastic bags. These bags can be used indefinitely for children who are never identified as having head lice. In cases where head lice have been identified, the bag should be replaced weekly until the child has been lice free for one month.
3. Caps and scarves can be kept at the individual desk.
4. Smocks or other clothing shared by children should be laundered through the hot wash cycle. Articles, such as stuffed animals, which cannot be laundered, should be stored in plastic bags for at least 14 days.
5. All upholstered furniture and carpeting should be thoroughly vacuumed.
6. When a total school screening is warranted, or in the case of a major outbreak of head lice, the following additional environmental control measures should be instituted:
 - a. Headphones should be stored for at least 14 days.
 - b. Children should be discouraged from sitting on carpeted areas and upholstered furniture until the problem is resolved.

Follow-Up Head Checks

1. An individual classroom head check or a total school head check, whichever the situation warrants, should be done 14 days after the identification of new cases(s). It should be repeated in 14 days. It is recommended that follow-up head checks be done at intervals specified by the principal.
2. This procedure should be continued until there have been two subsequent head checks at 14 day intervals where no new cases have been identified. Environmental control measures should be kept in effect until head checks are no longer necessary.

PRINCIPAL'S RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Basic Control and Prevention:
 - a. Screening to identify nits and head lice.
 - b. Encouraging classroom teachers to act as sentries and early case finders.
 - c. Scheduling staff in-service meetings on head lice control procedures.
 - d. Identifying additional persons in the school/community who are experienced in the identification of head lice.
 - e. Encouraging teachers to instruct students on how to prevent transmission of head lice.
 - f. Providing information articles for school newsletter regarding head lice.
 - g. Scheduling parent information meeting if necessary.
2. Head Lice Screening:
 - a. Notifying parents of presence of cases of head lice in school. (Sample Letter)
 - b. Acting as a secondary screener for cases of head lice already identified by the primary screener.

- c. Assisting designated persons with the notification and instruction of parents whose child is being excluded from school for suspected head lice.
- d. Keeping updated records of students excluded from school.
- e. Notifying parents if a total school head check is conducted.
- f. Recruiting additional staff as head lice screeners and arranging for their training.
- g. Notifying local public health department of situations where a home visit might be necessary for reinforcement of the instructions for head lice control.
- h. Arranging for subsequent head checks in accordance with the procedure, which was initiated.

